Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and forty-first plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 14 February 2018, at 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr. Ravinatha Aryasinha ..... (Sri Lanka)

GE.18-07500 (E) 190918 200918

1807500

Please recycle

The President: I call to order the 1441st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Excellencies, dear colleagues, following the plenary meeting of yesterday afternoon, I have modified the text of the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.605. You will find these modifications in document CD/WP.605/Rev.1, available in the room; an advance copy of this document was also circulated yesterday evening to all delegations by the secretariat. I have listened to all comments and tried to incorporate them to the extent possible in this revised version. This revision is the result of a delicate balance between diverging and sometimes positive views on the modalities to take forward our work. We have also tried to maintain the integrity of the document so as not to put it out of balance or make it impossible for delegations to work around. We still have a little time to focus on what are the most significant issues. I hope that today and tomorrow — and Friday, if we have to, and Saturday and Sunday, if we must — time will be used to try to find a point where we have something which works for all of us. It is in this spirit that I submit this draft decision for your consideration. I look forward to hearing your views and it is my intention to table this for approval later in the week.

Today, on my list of speakers I start with the Ambassador of Belarus.

Mr. Ambrazevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I thank you for your efforts to return the Conference on Disarmament to substantive work. My delegation has examined the original draft decision you presented and the most recent, finalized version that took into account the comments made. The document we have before us appears to be a balanced one that creates a sound basis for bridging differences, consolidating common interests and moving towards the final stage of the negotiation process, namely, the direct discussion of draft international legal instruments.

It is clear to us that the draft decision presented is a step forward based, among other things, on the outcome of the activities of the working group on the way ahead during the 2017 session. In our view, this is a logical and reasonable step that presents a rational approach to resolving the problems that we face. My delegation notes that the document neither seeks to address all the outstanding issues at once nor attempts to predetermine the outcome of our work together.

I would also like to caution against diminishing the importance of the main priority of the Conference, which is to develop international legal instruments. This should not be replaced by the development of a programme of work, despite the importance of implementing rule 28 of the rules of procedure. As we see it, the implementation of the proposed decision will make it possible to move towards agreement on the programme of work as a technical document that, in our view, complies with the letter and the spirit of rule 28. Moreover, we believe that the modalities of work in the decision can be included as important elements in the future programme of work.

We could undoubtedly spend a long time arguing about wording, but what is important is that, no matter how these processes are expressed on paper, the adoption of the proposed decision appears to be a good starting point for breaking the negotiating deadlock that the Conference has experienced for the past 22 years.

Distinguished colleagues, as I have already said in this chamber, what is required of us is relevant and timely work. We believe that the draft decision that has been presented fulfils this requirement. In that connection, allow me to declare my support for the proposed decision and express my hope that delegations will be able to show the necessary flexibility and will to adopt it.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Belarus for his statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Mexico on behalf of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I am taking the floor in my capacity as coordinator of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) in Geneva, and it is a happy coincidence that today, 14 February — indeed, a very happy 14 February to all of you — is the fifty-first anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

I would like to share with you the text adopted to mark this occasion:

The 33 member States of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL):

Commemorate the fifty-first anniversary of the adoption of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco);

Remember that, throughout five decades, the Treaty of Tlatelolco has guaranteed that the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as vast areas of the high seas adjacent to their territories, are kept free of nuclear weapons, without prejudice to the inalienable right of the States to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes; this Treaty is respected by the six States parties to the Additional Protocols, those being China, France, the Netherlands, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America;

Stress that the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone in a densely populated area, has served as a source of inspiration for four other regions in the world; and consider also that the Treaty and the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL) are an important endowment of the international community and a political, legal and institutional reference for the creation of other nuclear-weapon-free zones, on the basis of agreements freely arrived at by the States of the concerned region;

Stress that militarily denuclearized zones do not constitute an end in themselves, but rather a highly relevant intermediary step towards the realization of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament under effective international control;

Reiterate their conviction that the establishment of militarily denuclearized zones is closely related to the maintenance of peace and security in the respective regions and that the military denuclearization of vast geographical zones, adopted by sovereign decision of the States comprised therein, has exercised a beneficial influence on other regions;

Emphasize that the nuclear-weapon-free zones promote peace and stability at the regional and international levels by prohibiting the possession, acquisition, development, testing, manufacturing, production, stockpiling, deployment and use of nuclear weapons;

Stress the importance of cooperation among the States parties to the Treaties of Rarotonga, Bangkok, Pelindaba and Central Asia, which established nuclear-weapon-free zones, and Mongolia;

Call on nuclear-weapon States that issued interpretative declarations to Additional Protocols I and II to the Treaty of Tlatelolco which are contrary to the spirit of the Treaty to examine them together with OPANAL with the objective of revising or eliminating them in order to provide full and unequivocal security assurances to the States forming the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean; and to respect the militarily denuclearized character of the region;

Express that, pending the achievement of nuclear disarmament, it is the legitimate interest of the non-nuclear-weapon States, among them all the member States of OPANAL, to receive the unequivocal and legally binding guarantee of non-use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against them from the part of the nuclear-weapon-States; and also urge that efforts be made towards negotiating and adopting, within the shortest possible term, a universal and legally binding instrument on negative security assurances;

Recall their participation in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which prohibits the development, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, possession, transfer, use or threat of use of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;

Consider that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, as well as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, once in force, will add to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco) and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons on the path to the elimination of these weapons of mass destruction in a transparent, verifiable, and irreversible manner and within a clearly defined time frame;

Note that these four treaties establish norms of international law that are legally binding on the States which signed and ratified them; these legal instruments are not mere declarations of intention, nor can they automatically produce the disappearance of nuclear weapons; however, they are a suitable legal basis for the process aimed at eliminating all nuclear weapons forever;

Reiterate their commitment to participate in the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which represents an excellent opportunity to consider the principles, objectives and channels that promote the full implementation of the Treaty;

Express the importance of participating in the United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament, convened through resolution 68/32 of the General Assembly, to review the progress made in this regard;

Emphasize their concern over the international situation that is characterized by, inter alia, the resumption of nuclear tests, programmes for the modernization of nuclear arsenals, the potential creation of new types of nuclear weapons delivery systems and by the growing threat of possible use of nuclear weapons amid tensions, armed conflicts and terrorism threats; this happens in a context in which there still remain States possessing nuclear weapons, many of which are on high-alert status;

Ratify the commitment endorsed in the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace to continue to promote nuclear disarmament; moreover, based on the principles of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, maintain their decision to contribute to the consolidation of peace based on the sovereign equality of States, mutual respect and good neighbourliness, on the peaceful settlement of disputes, on the non-use or threat of use of force, on the right of self-determination, on territorial integrity, and on non-intervention in internal affairs;

Emphasize the valuable contribution that the Summer School on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation for Latin American and Caribbean diplomats organized by the Government of Mexico, the fourth edition of which took place in 2017, offers to education and to the promotion of the values, actions and goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation through training new defenders of nuclear disarmament in the region.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for her statement on behalf of OPANAL. I open the floor to any other comments on the draft decision which is before you. I guess everybody agrees. Could we adopt it?

I recognize the representative of Egypt, followed by the Ambassador of Mexico.

Mr. Youssef (Egypt): Mr. President, allow me, first of all, to reiterate my sincere appreciation for all the efforts you have been making for the revised draft decision that you have circulated. I would like as well to thank you for taking on board some of the elements we proposed in our last statement, particularly in relation to the responsibilities entrusted to the President of the Conference on Disarmament to present a programme of work, in accordance with rule 29 of the rules of procedure.

Mr. President, while acknowledging the difficulty of adopting a balanced and a comprehensive programme of work and that your draft decision is the only practical and pragmatic solution to advance the work of the Conference, we would also like to reiterate the necessity to adopt this decision in a manner that ensures the sustainability of the basic principles and tenets of the Conference, as well as its rules of procedure. We should strive towards preserving the Conference and its credibility. In this vein, Egypt has the following

proposals for the consideration of the Conference members to include in the draft decision, as contained in document CD/WP.605/Rev.1.

First, to add a title to the draft decision to read as follows: "Draft decision to establish subsidiary bodies on the agenda items of the Conference, as contained in document CD/2160."

Second, to delete the last preambular paragraph which, in our view, mischaracterizes the role of the Conference, as envisaged in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament

While noting the progressive approach towards nuclear disarmament, Egypt has been advocating a comprehensive approach towards this objective. We feel that the paragraph in its current form is unbalanced. In this regard, we prefer to delete the word "progressively" from operative paragraph 1 (b) because of its connotation.

Third, to delete the last operative paragraph, operative paragraph 5, which entails a rollover principle that is in prejudice to the role of the Conference and the Presidents. The window should remain open to Presidents of the subsequent annual session to conduct consultations on a programme of work and, should the situation permit, to submit a programme of work for the consideration of the Conference. We feel that the introduction of this principle might dissuade future Presidents of the Conference from doing so. Should there be a consensus among the members of the Conference to reconfirm this decision, the Conference members will have to take this decision at subsequent annual sessions.

Finally, Mr. President, we have full confidence in you and your team and we stand ready to assist you in achieving a productive outcome under your presidency.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Egypt for his statement and have noted the suggestions he has made on amendments. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Mexico.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico): Mr. President, I did not want to make two long statements, one after another, but it seems that it will be necessary, so thank you very much for giving me the floor. Allow me, once again, to express the gratitude of my delegation for the hard work that you are doing with your team during your presidency.

As mentioned yesterday, we strongly believe that if the Conference on Disarmament is not negotiating, it is not fulfilling its mandate. At the same time, we are aware of the sincere efforts that your presidency is exerting for the Conference to return to substantive work. Mexico has decided to make an effort and work on the basis of your text to see if we can achieve a consensus text and we are working on the basis of your draft decision contained in document CD/WP.605. We know that you just circulated a revised version of this draft decision, but because of time constraints and because we have worked on the basis of your previous text, we are going to make some suggestions for amendments based on the previous text.

First, we would like to suggest the inclusion of a new paragraph after the seventh preambular paragraph which starts: "Recalling paragraph 28 of its rule of procedure". The new paragraph which has language used in the decisions contained in documents CD/1974 and CD/2022 would read: "Without prejudice to the rules of procedure of the Conference and the responsibilities entrusted to the President, under the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, in particular rule 29 for drawing up the programme of work of the Conference." We are aware that in your revised version, you included a new paragraph recalling rule 29, but our concern would not be to address the issue only by recalling the rule. We need the assurance that Presidents will keep assuming responsibility for presenting a programme of work, even if the draft decision is adopted. As already mentioned, the suggested amendment is presented with previously agreed language to facilitate its acceptance by the membership and address our own concerns.

In the eighth preambular paragraph — "Taking into account the several proposals tabled since 2000 for the programme of work of the Conference and the interest to see the Conference return to substantive work and negotiation," — in our opinion, the phrase "return to substantive work and negotiations" could be interpreted as if substantive work

and negotiations are two different things. That would be against our national position, as we believe that the substantive work of the Conference can only be achieved through negotiations. In order to avoid this interpretation, we suggest the deletion of the phrase "and negotiations" at the end of the paragraph.

In the twelfth preambular paragraph — "Seeking to progressively advance the substantive work of the Conference in fulfilment of its mandate in accordance with SSOD I," — we suggest the deletion of the word "progressively". We believe that there is consensus on the need to seek advancement on the substantive work of the Conference, but not on how this advancement should be made. We are concerned that the inclusion of the word "progressively" could later be used to condition progress. The mere deletion of the word "progressively" would avoid an extended discussion in this regard, and I recall the delegation of Egypt making a similar point regarding the word "progressively".

In operative paragraph 1, regarding the mandate of the subsidiary bodies, we are concerned that none of the activities presented in the three subparagraphs describing the mandate includes negotiation. As already mentioned, in our opinion, in order to do substantive work, the only mandate should be to negotiate; but in order to try to keep the delicate balance in the draft decision, we will restrain ourselves from requesting the inclusion of such a mandate and only request the following regarding operative paragraph 1:

At the end of the paragraph, the phrase "inter alia" could be interpreted as a blank cheque in the absence of a clear and defined mandate for the subsidiary bodies. In order to provide clarity and clear focus on the mandate of the subsidiary bodies, we request the deletion of the phrase "inter alia".

On operative paragraph 1 (b), we request the deletion of the word "progressively". We believe that the elimination of this word does not change the substantive content of the paragraph and will help us to avoid further discussions on the approach that we should follow while seeking progress in disarmament negotiations.

While my delegation is making a huge effort to contribute to the adoption of your draft decision, although in principle we have serious doubts about its utility in getting the Conference back to substantive work, we are concerned that the current draft would institutionalize a deliberative exercise and lose focus on the need to fulfil the negotiating mandate of the Conference. Showing flexibility again, Mr. President, I am giving the benefit of the doubt to the outcome of this decision without prejudicing the work of the subsidiary bodies. We are making our best effort to allow the adoption of your draft decision for the 2018 session. Nevertheless, we are not in a position to support the notion of a rollover of this draft decision.

In this regard, we request the following changes. In operative paragraph 2, besides the deletion of the word "annually", already reflected in your revised version, other elements should be adjusted to avoid the notion of a rollover. Therefore, we suggest the following drafting: "Each subsidiary body will be chaired by a coordinator appointed by the Conference under the guidance of the President, on the basis of equitable regional distribution." Also to avoid the notion of a rollover, we request the deletion of operative paragraph 5. We believe that if the Conference decides later on to renew this decision, it would have the possibility to do so, even without the inclusion of this paragraph.

In operative paragraph 4, we request the inclusion of the phrase "report on the" at the beginning of the paragraph, so that it would read: "The report on the progress achieved and agreed on in each subsidiary body". Considering the experience of last year, we believe that if we want to keep a record of the progress made, there is no room for ambiguity on how this progress should be reflected.

Finally, we believe that it is of the utmost importance to include an additional operative paragraph which indicates that, should the Conference agree upon a programme of work with a negotiating mandate, all activities mandated by the present decision shall conclude and the coordinators shall report to the President of the Conference on the work of the subsidiary bodies, and, at the President's request, to the plenary session, according to the rules of procedure. This has been done in the decision contained in document CD/2090

and is consistent with the objective of seeking the adoption of a programme of work with a negotiating mandate.

Mr. President, we are open and at your disposal for further negotiations. I really want to highlight that we are making a big effort to continue our work to enable the Conference to move towards substantive work, but, at the same time, we have to keep one of our biggest concerns safe. This is the aim of this proposal we have presented and we are open and willing to discuss with all of you how we can move forward.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for the very specific proposals she has made, which will be duly considered. Let me now give the floor to the delegation of Iran.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, let me, once again, express my appreciation for all your hard work. I sent the advance copy that you distributed last night with a positive note to Tehran, but am still waiting for their analysis and guidance. Having said that, we have done some analysis and given thought to this draft decision within our delegation. I support what the previous delegations have indicated in relation to the importance of a programme of work, which is actually the main activity that we have been focusing on in recent years. So that notion should not be forgotten, but this draft decision, somehow, gives an interpretation that may put the programme of work on the sidelines and the work of the Conference on Disarmament would be embarked on only as substantive work. Iran s not against substantive work. As we have analysed, the gist of the plan that you have designed in this draft decision is to establish coordinators for the agenda items equitably and work on substantive work. Iran is not against that, but analysing the document, it sets precedents for the future and would be embarked on as a road map for our work. We should be very careful as to what extent the document supports the fundamental principles that exist within the rules of procedure of the Conference, in particular the issue of a programme of work.

I am very pleased that, based on the comment that the South African delegation made, you have introduced some notion of rule 29 of the rules of procedure, which mandates the President of the Conference to present a programme of work for its consideration and adoption. Yet, if one compares this to the decision last year on the working group on the way ahead, and we considered that as a pilot project, we have the same understanding related to this draft decision, since we are not able to adopt a programme of work with a negotiating mandate. Therefore, we believe that we should borrow a sentence from that draft decision that will give this text more strength. The sentence could come after the one that you have put in recalling rule 29. In the decision on the working group on the way ahead, there was a sentence emphasizing the importance of the programme of work: "Stressing the importance of adoption and implementation of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work with a negotiating mandate at the earliest possible date". There, of course it was referring to 2017 as the earliest time. Therefore, this time around, if we want to take this sentence, we should change it to "earliest possible date in its 2018 session". The reason behind this additional text is that, as already eloquently put by previous delegations, the upcoming Presidents should also embark on the programme of work as the most important element. In case we are able to come up with a programme of work under this pilot project — as we see it, it remains a pilot project — we would go through the process of the programme of work.

Regarding the different paragraphs of the preamble, we have some questions, some of which were raised by previous delegations. For example, in the third preambular paragraph, there is a notion of arms limitation. I am sure that you have taken this sentence from some document, but if we recall the discussion that we had regarding the negotiation of the report for 2017, there was a controversy surrounding that. If we take the concept of disarmament, that is fine; but if we take another concept, like arms limitation, that is subject to controversy because the raison d'être of this Conference is disarmament. So, issues related to arms limitation, whether it be bilateral, multilateral or whatever, are maybe not a subject for the Conference on Disarmament. Of course, the Conference should be attentive to those activities, but our work here is to negotiate disarmament treaties.

Having said that, I think I can subscribe to the point raised by the Chinese delegation yesterday related to the preambular paragraph that starts "Cognizant of the complex nature of the issues under purview, the wide range of perspectives thereon". Then you have put "including on the level of maturity of their consideration". Of course, this sentence may be, in terms of paraphrasing, an innocent sentence. However, there are controversies surrounding that, as was pointed out yesterday by our colleague from China. There has to be discussion of which subject is mature or ripe for negotiation, since there are different views in that regard.

I subscribe to the issue that was raised by our colleagues from Egypt as well as Mexico on the issue of the word "progressive". Of course, we have been witnessing that in the open-ended working group. Our interlocutors have discussed the document in terms of building-blocks and a progressive approach. Of course, Iran, in terms of nuclear disarmament, is not taking that approach. Iran is following the comprehensive approach. Therefore, having this concept in this delicate draft decision would give the notion that we are converting the Conference to a progressive venue, where we are looking just in terms of the discussion of technical issues. We will follow disarmament issues which are on the agenda of the Conference in terms of a progressive approach. Therefore we should be very cautious about using this term.

On operative paragraph 1, some points were raised by colleagues, including paragraph 1 (c), which states: "Consider effective measures, including possible legal instruments for negotiations." Well, the position of this delegation is well known. In the informal working groups, there has been some discussion by others as to what extent — when the Conference on Disarmament is not able to negotiate a treaty, a legally binding document — it should embark on something politically binding. Unfortunately or fortunately, Iran does not share this concept. Therefore, in the phrase "possible legal instruments for negotiation", I think that the word "possible" is not a very good qualifier, so we should delete it.

On the issue of the participation of non-members, of course they are most welcome in terms of their request for participation; but if one looks at the rules of procedure, their situation has been dealt with separately. In operative paragraph 3 bis on their participation, it is not only the issue of the participation of member States that is being dealt with, but it has been attached to a sentence that also deals with the situation of non-members. Therefore, we believe that it should be in a separate sentence.

On the issue of the participation of civil society, this is a long-standing issue and it was touched upon yesterday. I just wanted to mention here that this time around, in 2018, there has been a meeting on the participation of civil society. Therefore, we are confused as to what extent the participation of civil society would contribute to this delicate draft decision. Of course, the participation of experts is there under the terms of the rules of procedure, but it has been defined in the sense that, when each country gives the list of participants for each delegation, it would indicate that to the Conference on Disarmament. However, we have also been witnessing some delegations that are working in the name of and representing one country, but at the same time they have invited experts from another country. I am wondering if this issue is also under consideration in the context of this draft decision.

Next, Mr. President, is the issue of the report and how the subsidiary bodies would work. I have referred to the rules of procedure, which clearly indicate that the subsidiary bodies should hold informal meetings, unless the Conference decides otherwise; but here it has been established. This was touched upon by other delegations and was changed a bit, but it is not clear to what extent we are going to work on the issue.

Lastly, Mr. President, is the issue of whether this draft decision remains confirmed for next year. We have doubts, as I have indicated: we think that this draft decision is another attempt, or I could say another pilot project, on how the Conference on Disarmament would embark on its work. Therefore, we believe that this draft decision should remain only for 2018.

The President: I thank the delegate of Iran and have taken note of his suggestions, which will also be taken note of in the further refining of this document.

Do any other delegations wish to take the floor? I see none.

In that case, I think we can conclude for today. We have a choice for tomorrow: we have the morning session and the afternoon session. We are very conscious that tomorrow is the Chinese New Year and would like to be advised by our Chinese colleague which part of the day — the morning or the afternoon — is more auspicious. I think we should meet during the auspicious one.

I see the representative of Cuba wants to take the floor. Let us give the floor to the representative of Cuba and then to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Pérez Álvarez (Cuba): Mr. President, I just want to briefly thank you for all of your efforts. I have not had an indication from my capital on this text. I invite you to suspend the meeting and go into an informal session today to try to finish this draft.

The President: Let us keep that thought and come back to that. I thank the representative of Cuba. The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, please.

Mr. Kim In-chul (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I really commend and pay tribute to all your efforts in reaching here. We are almost there. Even though we are almost there, it does not mean that we are there, so we may need to do some work.

My comment is about when we will be holding the next meeting. The actual lunar new year is on Friday. Even though in English it is translated as "Chinese New Year", in Chinese it is *Nong Li Xin Nian*, which means "agricultural calendar new year"; so, it is not the calendar new year. The lunar new year is celebrated in China, in Korea and in Viet Nam. In Viet Nam, it is called *Tet* and that is why we all remember the *Tet* events years ago. So our preference would be, if possible, to finish this thing tomorrow.

The President: Thank you very much for that. I am all for finishing this tomorrow. All I was wanting to do was to make it clear that, in fact, I did consult with the Chinese Ambassador on what to do if we need to, and he has indicated to me that we should go about doing what we have to do. I am grateful and I have taken note of what the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea has said. Maybe we should go into an informal session on what the best time to break is. We will take note of that and try to finish tomorrow. The delegation of the Russian Federation wants to take the floor.

Mr. Davydov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, one question arises here, and it is clear, I think, that it is a problem not only for us but for many other delegations. If we start speeding up the process artificially like this, then how do you think we will be able to get definitive instructions from our capitals about the final version of your draft? The opinions that have been expressed so far relate to what we have seen up till now and we do not yet know what form this will all take or whether some element that is unacceptable to delegations will appear in the draft.

The President: I thank the delegation of the Russian Federation. I take note of that. It is important that we know that. I can only tell you what I was thinking, and my thought was to gather any considerations today. I think the Cuban proposal that we should have an informal meeting now is a good one in that context. I think that we will take it up unless anybody has any other formal comments.

We will revisit this draft. I do not think we need to go into another round of major negotiations. If there is anything that is a particular issue for a delegation, maybe we could discuss it — my door is open. By tomorrow morning, we will have what Sri Lanka, as the President, believes is a workable draft that can be adopted. I was hoping that maybe we could meet on Thursday afternoon. I did not know that it was Friday, I am sorry. So now we have an additional factor to take into account. That was my thinking. We either have a choice of circulating a draft tomorrow, not having meetings tomorrow and meeting on Friday, or else of circulating the draft tomorrow morning — because we must do it formally — and then have the meeting tomorrow afternoon and trying to see if we can finish tomorrow. I also want to give more time to those delegations which have said that they need more time to consult their capitals. I know that there are some of our colleagues who are not here today who might want to weigh in on this.

As I said yesterday, we do not want to do this in haste. It is an important step, it is a step with which we must all fully engage. We are not in a hurry to do that, but I am very conscious that there are also various considerations that we must factor in. Holidays and calendars are important to all our countries, at different points, and if we have to in some way impinge on some of this celebration, there are two options: that you bear with us or that we celebrate together. So having said that, I give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Fu Cong (China): Mr. President, first let me thank you for being so considerate to the Chinese delegation. Also I want to thank the Ambassador of South Korea for spreading the good news that the Chinese New Year falls on Friday. As you can see, this is not only Chinese New Year, it is new year for many other people and countries.

Just now you asked a specific question: whether tomorrow it is better to have the meeting in the morning or in the afternoon. If it is at all possible, we suggest that we have the meeting in the morning, because it is in the afternoon that the Chinese New Year's Eve falls, so that is a time for family reunion. We hope the fact that the Chinese New Year is approaching can be an added incentive for countries or for delegations to speed up their work, so that we can reach agreement on the draft decision. As far as I can see, it is already within our reach and if we can do it, if we can speed up the work, I think that we will be able to finish before Chinese New Year's Eve. That is our hope and wish.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China. The only problem is going to be that if we circulate the draft tomorrow morning, there might not be enough time for delegations to consult with their capitals and come back to us. I am conscious of this. Let us keep that thought in mind. I see the delegation of Mexico wanted the floor. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, with regard to the point that you just made, we have no problem with meeting tomorrow morning, but, if the text is circulated, we will not be in a position to adopt it because, given the time difference, we will not have had time for consultations and will not be ready. However, if we meet tomorrow and again on Friday, we may be ready by then.

The President: Of course, the other option is that we skip tomorrow and meet on Friday, in the new year. I can see that the Chinese Ambassador is giving us the OK. I am sure that the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea will give it too. What about Viet Nam?

Shall we first, before we do this, get a sense of the meeting and take up the Cuban delegation's suggestion? If there are no formal comments, let us go into an informal session. The Cuban delegation is asking for the floor again.

Ms. Pérez Álvarez (Cuba): Mr. President, I am sorry and I really thank you for all of your efforts. Maybe you can suspend the meeting for 10 minutes so that we can hold some consultations. Then, we can have the informal meeting and you can circulate the text today, so we can adopt it on Friday.

The President: Friday morning? Let us pause on that thought and let us have a 10-minute break. We will meet again around 4.15 p.m. in an informal session.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Tomorrow, we will, in our own way, celebrate the new year and we will come back and meet on Friday at 10 a.m. and, hopefully, we will be able to conclude and adopt this decision. I wish you all a Happy Valentine's Day. Some of you will have the opportunity to celebrate immediately; some of us will have to work a little longer before we get to it. I bring this meeting to a close.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.